

# **WHAT MOTIVATES THE MALAYSIAN WORKFORCE – CONTENT & PROCESS**

**BY**

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## **WHAT MOTIVATES THE MALAYSIAN WORKFORCE –**

### **CONTENT & PROCESS**

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If human resources are to be effectively utilized, management has to understand what motivates employees. While motivation research has produced some solid evidence in the western world, little is known about what motivates their counterparts in developing countries especially Malaysia.

This MM project paper aims to explore the responsiveness of Malaysian workforce with varying ethnical cultures values to work motivation concepts. This research is beneficial in understanding the key motivating factors for Malaysians to improve work satisfaction and productivity.

In order to empirically test the work motivation content and process effectiveness in the Malaysian settings, this study has developed a cultural-based work motivation model. The research instrument developed with local contents as its major focus, built upon (i) organizational behavior's cultural dimensions concepts; and (ii) work motivation theories from both content and process approaches.

Based on mean responses, the rank order of work motivation content factors in descending importance is: (i) financial rewards; (ii) recognition; (iii) good working conditions; (iv) growth and promotion opportunities; and (v) achievement needs. The data analysis suggested that Malaysian employees are generally responsive to most work motivation processes.

Finding showed (i) correlation between motivational factors and ethnic values; and (ii) employee's demographic profile influences the motivation inclination. The evidence suggested further research area into the comparative study of the foreign and local work motivation needs to clearly determine cross-cultural implications on work motivation theories.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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The first chapter aims to introduce the research topic. The background section presents the research worthy problem. The purpose section justifies the importance to study the problem. The scope section indicates the physical and logical boundaries of the project. The structure section presents a preview of the project paper flow.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Organization of all sizes is faced with the task of finding ways to attract, motivate and retain high quality employees in competitive markets. As the prosperity and growth of a nation is very much dependent upon the availability of physical resources together with an effective allocation and management of human resources, it has attracted the concerns not only researches but politician and reformers alike (Siu, 1992). This is because the backbone of a nation economy lies in the strength of the human assets being the catalyst for tapping into the various national resources. In order to elicit an optimum level of performance from our most priced asset – manpower, it is imperative for us to study the driving forces of work motivation to enhance productivity and instill enthusiasm at the workplace.

There is an old saying “You can take a horse to the water but you cannot force it to drink; It will drink only if it’s thirsty” This is so true with people. They will do what they want to do or other wise motivated to do. Whether it is to excel on the workshop floor in the ‘ivory tower’ they must be motivated or driven to it, either by themselves or through an external stimulus. Are they born with an inner drive to do

succeed? Yes or No. If no, can be motivated, for motivation is a skill which can and must be learnt. This is essential for any business to survive and succeed.

Stephen Robbins has observed that 1950s were fruitful period in the development of motivation concepts. Since 1952, theoretical and experimental work on motivation has been carried on under watchful surveillance from Lincoln, Nebraska. The Nebraska Symposium on Motivation has annually summoned some five or six psychologist to deliver their findings and ideas. It is interesting to note that there are no such relative motivation concepts from a secular and eastern perspective.

Leaders have the onerous task of creating and maintaining a culture that promotes a healthy momentum inspiring employees to become enthusiastic and productive in the work they do. This is largely due to the fact that motivation continues to be poorly understood. Although motivation is widely recognized its essence is elusive...it is a complex multifaceted construct, which researchers have approached from many perspectives (Corley, 2003).

As there are no prevailing local motivational concepts catering to the intercultural dimensions in the country, most Malaysian organizations have been using and adopting motivation concepts which have originated elsewhere. It has been observed that such motivation concepts do not have a lasting effect but serve more as temporary stimulant to complete the task at hand. There is need to explore the level of effectiveness in applying western motivation concepts at the intercultural Malaysian workplace.

## **1.2 Objective of the Study**

The objective of this study is to explore and understand the driving factors that motivate Malaysian employees. Malaysian presents a salad bowl mixture of culture with major ethnic groups of Malay, Chinese and Indian. As Malaysia is a nation with an intercultural mix of ethnic groups, managers need to fully comprehend the urge and hurdles of the way of their staff.

Western motivation theories are arguably incompatible with local eastern local flavor. Such a fact has often been overshadowed among general publics who are not trained to appreciate cross-cultural diversity exchanges. It has caused much disappointment as these motivation techniques have not been found to be effectively applied locally.

## **1.3 Significance of the Study**

There are many western studies on work motivation that are available in the current management literature such as Alfred Adler, Robert W. White, Stanley Schachter, Edwin C. Nevis and James C. Abegglen. However, studies focusing on the cultural dimensions of work motivation especially in the eastern context are relatively scarce. Moreover, there is little systematic study on the phenomenon by country segregation. The geographical scope of this study is on employees attached to organization within Malaysia.

This area of research will generate new data that may be useful in filling a vacuum in local studies on how members from different cultural background response to western motivation techniques at Malaysian workplace. The vacuum can be filled in

terms of (a) Content motivation priority ranking and (b) process motivation responsiveness with regards to the various ethnic group preferences.

The data generated in this research will enable us to comprehend a significant productivity enhancement issue in an organizational setting. This issue involves the Malaysian employees and their cultural background, their age cohort, their organization and their interactive environment at work and outside at work context. Such data could be useful in human resources planning, development and training, work structures and employees' mental health.

#### **1.4 Organization of the Thesis**

As an organization productivity development technique, the study of work motivation at the intercultural level has not received much attention in Malaysia. The research instrument on cultural dimensions is an original form of research into Malaysian Socio-economy life. This paper is divided into the following chapters:

- (i) The introduction contains an overview of the research background central issue and sets the research boundary. It highlights the research purpose and significance in addressing the research problem.
- (ii) In literature review , the basic concepts of work motivation and cultural assumptions used will be explained a brief review is provide on selected literature on work motivation researches unfolding the progression in the area of study.

- (iii) The research methodologies state the research objectives and present the research design model together with research hypothesis. Variables used in the questionnaire will be described. The sampling choice of gaining respondent feedback together with statistical and data processing procedures are also explained in this chapter.
- (iv) The results chapter provides the research profile of the sample used in the survey. It includes a presentation of the (a) descriptive statistics describing the significant cultural values and motivational factors; (b) association statistics on the relation of cultural values to motivational factors; (c) differentiation statistics on the variation of motivational factors at the level of intercultural ethnic diversity and demographic factors influences.
- (v) The discussion analyses the research findings for norms and discrepancies. Research hypothesis acceptance and rejection will be determined by result significance.
- (vi) The final chapter to conclude the study will include a summary of the research, significant findings, a limitation description of inadequacies of the study and some recommendations to improve future research on similar interest.

## **1.5 Summary**

The research problem is so identify the work motivation factors for the Malaysian workforce. It is importance for Malaysian managers to understand how intercultural values and demographic factors affect work motivation needs of the workforce in order to adopt work motivation techniques effectively. The scope of this study is confined to the Malaysian workforce and western work motivation content and process concepts. The research will be reported in 6 chapters namely introduction, literature review, methodology, data analysis, discussion and conclusion.

## **CHAPTER 2: .LITERATURE REVIEW**

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### **2.0 Introduction**

The literature review aims to provide a picture of available information in the research topic of cultural dimensions in work motivation concepts. Ethnic work values and motivation section attempt to answer the question of relationship between cultural values and work motivation. Content motivation theories section discuss and review the Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory , Aldermen's ERG theory , McClelland's acquired needs theory and Hertzberg's two-factor theory .

On the other hand, process motivation theories section discuss and review Room's expectancy theory, Adam's equity theory , Locke's goal theory and Kelly's attribution theory. The personal and situational factors section evaluates the contribution of other researchers who investigated the demographic factors influences on work motivation.

### **2.1 Ethnics Work Values and Motivation**

#### **2.1.1. Cross Cultural Work Values and Motivation**

The literature on cross cultural differences in work motivation has not been emphasized in the analysis of managerial values until lately. The literature relating to motivation and work values cross-culturally has largely taken western concepts such as achievement motivation, job involvement and job satisfaction and attempted to describe what they might mean in a different cultural context (Blunt, 1983). Along with globalization of businesses, western

management theories are being exported to other parts of the world. This has met with growing skepticism by many scholars.

In Western management literature and thought, US cultural stereotypes still prevail (Tedeschi et al., 1985; Blunt and Jones, 1997). There has been an implicit assumption that the installation of such stereotypes is desirable and possible (Munro, 1986), and this is despite the fact that the comparisons with the Western countries suggest fundamental differences which indicate the need for a redefinition of some of these concepts (Blunts and Jones, 1997).

Much of what we know about work motivation today is the contributions from researches based on the experiences and practices of managers in industrialized countries. It is noteworthy that such industrialized work organizations tend to be more formal and mechanistic than those in less developed countries undergoing industrialization. The western norm values of individualism, competition, egalitarianism, rationality, achievement, orientation, secularism, problem-solving orientation and assertiveness are often considered as universal and can be applied across cultures.

Hofstede (1980) has proposed that the underlying assumptions of Southeast Asian cultures differed with that of American culture. In Southeast Asian cultures, work is perceived as a necessity. People find their rightful place in the community behaving as members of a big family, co-existing peacefully and harmoniously with the environment. Persons in authoritative positions are highly respected and their instructions are given loyal adherence.



On the other hand, assumptions in the American cultures suggest that work is good for people and that people should maximize their potentials. The organizational objectives exist separately from people who behave as unattached individuals. The American assumptions laid the foundation on which many modern management theories thrived. Such theories are based on assumptions that are probably absent in countries without an Anglo-American cultures.'

Hofstede's (1980) seminal study collected sufficient data for analysis from only 5 out of 8 Far Eastern country and 7 out 7 Anglo countries categorized by the synthesis of country clusters adopted from Ronan and Shanker (1985). The Anglo countries consist of Australia (AUL), Canada (CAN), Ireland (IRE), New Zealand (NZL), South Africa (SAF), Great Britain (GBR), and United States (USA).

Table 2.1: Hofstede work values of Anglo country clusters.

ANGLO	AUL	CAN	IRE	NZL	SAF	GBR	USA
<b>Power Distance</b>	medium	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium
<b>Avoid Uncertainty</b>	medium	medium	low	medium	medium	low	medium
<b>Individualism</b>	high	high	high	high	high	high	high
<b>Masculinity</b>	high	medium	high	medium	high	high	high

The Far Eastern countries included in the studies are Hong Kong (HOK), Philippines (PHI), Singapore (SIN), Taiwan (TAI) and Thailand (THA).The Far Eastern countries that have not been included are Indonesia, Malaysia and South Vietnam.

Table 2.2; Hofstede work values of Far Eastern country clusters.

<b>FAR EASTERN</b>	<b>HOK</b>	<b>PHI</b>	<b>SIN</b>	<b>TAI</b>	<b>THA</b>
<b>Power Distance</b>	high	high	high	medium	high
<b>Avoid Uncertainty</b>	low	medium	low	medium	medium
<b>Individualism</b>	low	low	low	low	low
<b>Masculinity</b>	medium	high	medium	medium	medium

Hofstede's work showed that Southeast Asian countries score high on power distance, medium/low on uncertainty avoidance, low on individualism, medium high on masculinity compared to Anglos who score medium low, medium low, high and high respectively.

White Hofstede's dimensions showed some time stability and predictability for highly developed countries, his data was based on one employer with male-dominated responses. More recent research has revealed that there are relevant values and beliefs that might characterize Southeast Asian countries as different to other country groupings.

The Cultural Dimensions of Anglos, Australians and Malaysians paper by Asma Abdullah and Lrong Lim (2004) have highlighted 2 major arguments: (i) cultural dimensions of Malaysians differ significantly with those of Anglos and Australians; (ii) management theories and practices developed in the Anglo-American context may not be suitable for application in the Malaysian environment barring modifications.

The empirical findings of the paper showed that the Anglos scored lowest means in four dimensions: collectivism, religious, hierarchy, and high-context. The Anglos findings, it can be concluded that western management theories and practices developed in the Anglo-American context may not be suitable for application in the Malaysian cultures which are less individualistic, shame driven, hierarchical oriented, religious-centered, high context, and relationship-focused with harmony seeking behaviors.

Researchers have continually debated that the existing motivation measuring devices are inadequate, being western-based, incompatible with local values and making prior assumptions about behavior patterns and item wording (Crowne and Marlowe, 1964; Oppenheim, 1992; Wall, 1991). Such biasness can be at best increase the error variance and at worst invalidate the measures themselves.

### **2.1.2 Inter Cultural Work Values and Motivation**

The study of organization and managerial behavior in most institutions of learning and training in Malaysia is strongly influenced by Anglo-American and European based thinking ( Jamieson , 1983 : 85 ; Bettignies , 1986 ; Westwood , 1991 ) this is not surprising as most of the contemporary management literature come from the Anglo-American traditions ( Boyacigiller & Adler , 1991 ).

The cultural dimensions of Anglos, Australians and Malaysians study by Asma Abdullah and Lrong Lim marked significant contributions in their investigation

of the similarities and differences among five groups of managers with regards to eight cultural dimensions. It has been concluded that there were negligible significant differences among the three Malaysian major ethnic groups in all the dimensions except for religiosity. The result is supportive of the previous research that found little differences among Malaysian in cultural values (Yusof & Amin, 1999).

Although Malaysians belong to different ethnic origins, they have streamlined their values under a shared wider socio-cultural environment. Malaysians tend to emphasize relationships over tasks, feelings of shame over feelings of guilt, collectivism over an individual orientation, religiously over secularity, hierarchy over equality, and high context communication over low context communication.

Among Malaysians, there is significant difference in five dimensions: Relationship, shame, hierarchy, collectivism, and high context. The sole difference among the Malaysian groups occurred in the religiously dimension (Asma Abdullah & Lrong Lim, 2004). While the Indians and the Chinese are not significantly different from each other in religious dimension score, both these groups differ significantly from the Malays. A possible implication of this finding is that the Chinese and the Indians have adapted to a more commercial orientation more so than the Malay have.

The Malay scored the highest means for the five dimensions: relationship, shame, religiously, hierarchy, and high-context. The Malays placed far more importance on relationships than the Chinese and the Indians. Similarly, while all the three groups emphasized the notion of shame, the Malays showed the strongest tendency to do so because Malays see shame as an ingredient of social judgment and assessment. (Asma Abdullah & Lrong Lim, 2004)

The Malays placed a higher degree of importance on fulfilling religious obligations and upholding their religious values and practices at the workplace. Malays emphasized the importance and status, and deference to senior and male elder. Malays also practiced high context form of communication with the desire to preserve harmonious relationships. (Asma Abdullah & Lrong Lim, 2004)

The Chinese relationship scores were close to the overall mean score. Chinese scored fairly high on shame dimension rank second after Malays. Chinese cultural values of face-saving sets the notion of being openly ridiculed and punished brings shame to the person and the family members. (Asma A, 2004)

Chinese collectivism score was in between Indians and Malays. Chinese religious dimension score was close to the overall mean score. Chinese hierarchy and high-context dimension scores followed closely after the Malays. Because of their respect for elder and status, Chinese accepted that only leaders are entrusted to make the right decisions and the subordinates have the obey their authority with no challenges. The Chinese style of communication is high

context communication maintained that that being to open, frank and direct can be seen being insensitive to the feelings to the others. (Asma A, 2004).

The Indians relationship score was similar to the Chinese and closer to the overall mean score. The Indian shame and hierarchy dimension scores were almost identical to the overall mean score. The Indians scored the highest on collectivism, being champion of causes with high-spirited participation in socializing events out of their sense of belonging and brotherhood loyalty. The Indians scored the second highest in religious dimension with their strong believe in Karma and deep reverence for god. Indians rank third in the high-context dimension scored right after Malays and Chinese. (Asma A, 2004).

If a particular motivational factor can be found to be consistently highly correlated with one or more cultural values, it may have fundamental motivational values of its own, in addition to its general effects upon most or all work values and motivation measures. It would be worthwhile to perform cultural surgery in conceptualizing the motivational patterns of the Malaysian workforce and to determine the driving forces which are aligned with local cultural values. In striving for greater homogeneity of basic human values, the local cultural roots cannot be undermined. (Asma Abdullah & Lrong Lim, 2004).

## **2.2 Content Motivation Theory**

### **2.2.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory**

In 1943, American psychologist Abraham Maslow attempted to explain purposeful behavior with the hierarchy of needs. The basic of the model is that all individuals have innate needs or wants which they seek to satisfy. The model further emphasizes a built-in prioritizing system of the innate needs forming a hierarchical structure.

Maslow has adopted 5 major need variables in his theory and these are:

- (i) Psychological: biological requirement to stay alive and function normally.
- (ii) Safety: instinctive need for secure and stable environment to be free from harm.
- (iii) Social: belongingness need for love, affection and interaction.
- (iv) Esteem: self-respect need for achievement; social esteem need for recognition.
- (v) Self actualization: self-fulfillment need for purposeful life realizing potentials.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory is based on the following assumptions:

- (i) Needs must be satisfied in the given order. A person cannot be motivated to achieve sales target (level 4) when having marriage problems (level 3).
- (ii) Employee behavior is motivated simultaneously by several need levels but behavior is motivated mostly by the lowest unsatisfied need at the time.
- (iii) Satisfaction –progression process. Human being has an innate desire to work up the hierarchy. As the person satisfies a lower level need, the next higher need in the hierarchy becomes the primary motivator. When deprived of satisfaction from a lower hierarchical need, that specific need will again become a motivator.

Maslow's theory has been very influential in assisting managers to get the basis right before undertaking complex motivational initiatives. It has switched their focus to examine motivation from the employee perspective. In addition Ferrett (1994) is also of the opinion that it requires more to create a positive work attitude than simply to satisfy low-level needs. Higher level need is deemed more likely to motivate in the long run. Once basic needs are met, the driving force that influences a person to be truly motivated to work comes from within.

However, the model is too rigid to explain the dynamics and unstable characteristics of employee needs. Research have found that individual needs do not cluster neatly around the five categories described in the model. Moreover, gratification of one need level does not necessarily lead to increased